

8 November 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Session with Secretary Laird

1. My 8 November session with Secretary Laird was quite relaxed and informal, but four matters did come up of which you should be apprised.

2. Intelligence Community Reorganization. Once the coffee was poured and initial amenities exchanged, Secretary Laird launched into a bantering but purposeful discourse on the recently announced intelligence community reorganization, making comments I am sure were intended for your ears. Most of his remarks concentrated on the assumption of the net assessment responsibility by the NSC Staff and the choice of Mr. Anthony Marshall to direct these endeavors. Laird professed himself surprised that things had worked out this way. He said the net assessment responsibility clearly belonged in CIA under your command direction and not at the White House with the NSC Staff, which had neither the talent nor the numbers of people necessary to cope with this problem. He claimed that as of his departure from Washington last Tuesday, he had understood that this task was in fact going to be assigned to CIA and he was at a loss to understand who or what had switched signals in his absence.

3. Mr. Marshall was given quite short shrift. Laird said he had come to the Defense Department seeking employment and had been interviewed by a number of people, including Mr. Packard and "Carl" (last name not given). None of those who interviewed him had been particularly impressed with his qualifications or background. Defense had not hired him because they had not felt him capable of doing what needed to be done. Hence, said Laird, he was astounded to learn that Mr. Marshall had been taken on by the White House.

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4. I remained politely quiet during the above recital, offering no argument and simply noting in passing that these were matters outside my knowledge or sphere of responsibility.

5. Prisoner Matters. Laird, Pursley and I had an amicable three-way discussion about the handling of communications on sensitive prisoner matters and possible release operations. Laird said he had discussed this question with Shackley and Abrams (as we knew from Shackley's cable). After a considerable amount of bidding review, I suggested that whereas the Secretary obviously needed to be informed promptly of significant developments -- and we had indeed taken all possible steps to insure that he was so informed -- we nonetheless did have problems with present procedures involving use of the SPECAT channel. The mechanics of the latter were apparently such that correspondence from Abrams to the Secretary handled therein inevitably went to CINCPAC and to a number of senior JCS offices and officers who did not necessarily have prisoner responsibilities or any need to know about sensitive prisoner operations. Laird acknowledged that this was probably the case. The upshot of our conversation was an undertaking on his part to speak to Admiral Moorer on the latter's return and devise a system of communications handled either in our channels or military channels whereby information and comment on prisoner matters can come directly from Abrams to Moorer and Laird without miscellaneous and extraneous addressees.

6. The Vietnam Situation and Troop Withdrawal. Laird was quite encouraged by what he had seen in Vietnam and by the attitude of President Thieu on the whole subject of troop withdrawals. Thieu was in fact willing to countenance an even faster pace than the U.S. Government is now considering. Thieu clearly took with Laird the same general line on increasing GVN strength and diminishing GVN need for any U.S. combat presence that, as we know from [REDACTED] Thieu has recently taken with other visitors. Laird did not divulge specifics but it was quite clear from our conversation that he plans to recommend that President Nixon announce a major reduction and appreciably accelerated withdrawal schedule when the President speaks on 15 November. He said he would send us a copy of his report to President Nixon as soon as it was typed and delivered to the President.

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7. Chiefs of Station. Laird went out of his way to say a number of complimentary things about Ted Shackley, the briefings Shackley had given him, and the support MACV received from our Saigon Station. He asked about Shackley's background and Agency experience, which I sketched in brief outline. I also told him that Shackley was to become Chief of our WH Division after his return from Vietnam.

8. Laird then asked about Shackley's designated replacement. I gave Tom Polgar a buildup, summarizing his background and stressing his considerable competence, his effectiveness and his very low-key approach. I cited the [REDACTED] incident as a symptomatic example of Tom's skill and technique. This seemed to make quite a favorable impression on Laird.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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